

6 August 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on Senator Dodd's Speech

1. I am not sure whether you wanted something to send to Senator Dodd, or simply for your own contemplation. Attached is a memo which you could conceivably send, if the Senator is one to whom you divulge the specific contents of NIEs. I suppose, however, that it should be TOP SECRET. A few other comments can be made:

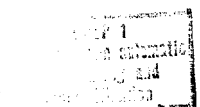
a. (Page 14 of the speech) Laird is certainly right in saying that the Soviets "might have a force of 2,500 ICBMs by the mid-70s." I can't get my own arithmetic to come out, as the Senator's does, to 2,500 in four years, but in this field a man's arithmetic is apt to follow the election returns.

b. (Page 14) If the Senator thinks that Soviet production lines will continue at the high level of recent years until the Kremlin . . . etc., there is nothing yet to prove him wrong. (Though something hangs on whether he means the extremely high rate of 1966-67, or the much diminished one of late 1967 and 1968.) The Senator's statement on the top of page 15, to similar effect, is a mere truism.

c. (Page 15, penultimate paragraph) This notion of "concentrating on hard information" and avoiding "speculation" sounds impressive. If this had been the rule, however, we should among other things never have been able to warn the government of probable new weapons systems, for which warnings see the record as set forth in the attached piece.

2. Sometime I should like to make up a list of new weapons systems, dreamed up for the Soviets by somebody in DOD or the

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services, which have been rejected, rightly, in the estimative process. One was the nuclear-powered bomber, another (a few years ago) was the SS-9 with 25 warheads, each independently guided and with a CEP of one-tenth of a nautical mile. But I couldn't make such a list defensible, since it would depend too much on our own fallible memory.

ABBOT SMITH

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6 August 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on Senator Dodd's Speech of 1 August 1969

1. Despite a good deal of diligent and protracted effort, it has never proved possible to get a clear answer to the question: how accurate have intelligence estimates been? Out of the very large body of papers issued over the past eighteen or twenty years it is possible to cite many instances of judgments which were wrong, others which were correct, and (perhaps most numerous of all) those which were partly wrong and partly right, or of which the accuracy cannot be conclusively checked.

2. Respecting Senator Dodd's specific charges, I leave out of account Pearl Harbor, the invasion of South Korea, and the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, since they all occurred before the present machinery for coordinated estimates was in existence. Beyond these, it is true that neither the invasion of Hungary in 1956 nor that of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were forecast in National Intelligence Estimates, which represent the consensus of the intelligence community; in fact no such coordinated papers were prepared on these situations in the months immediately preceding the invasions. In both cases, however, and especially that of Czechoslovakia, various current intelligence publications and occasional memoranda during the final weeks reported the state of high tension and the Soviet military build-up. Without saying that invasions were likely, these papers emphasized that they were possible, and surely under consideration by the Soviet leadership. The US government was certainly made aware that the invasions might occur, though it was not assured that they would occur.

3. It is also true that a National Intelligence Estimate in September, 1962, held that the Soviets would not tempt the fates by deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba. And it is true that in recent years our estimates of Soviet intentions regarding the size of Soviet ICBM forces have turned out to be conservative; possibly they will turn out to have been "woefully" conservative.

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4. Our performance with respect to the Soviet H-bomb represents one of those many instances where we were either good or bad, depending on the way one looks at it. We did fail to predict it "accurately." Yet Special Estimate No. 36, issued on 5 March 1953, said that field testing of a thermonuclear device was possible by mid-1954, and further that "it would be unsafe to assume that the USSR will not have a workable thermonuclear weapon by mid-1955." On 18 August 1953 NIE-90 said that field testing might take place "at any time." Soon afterward it was confirmed by analysis that the first test had in fact occurred on 12 August.

5. It may also be true in a sense that the intelligence community was "completely without advance information on the Soviet sputnik" in 1957. Nevertheless, in December, 1955, an NIE said that the Soviets could put an earth satellite into orbit by 1958, and in March, 1957, another NIE estimated that they could do so before the end of the year. They did, in October. We have always considered this a praiseworthy example of good estimating on the basis of very scanty "hard" information.

6. As for the "missile gap" estimates, we certainly did not fall for phony information put out by Khrushchev for the purpose of intimidating us. There was very little hard information available apart from the fact that the Soviets had tested an ICBM in 1957. The principal basis for our overestimate was the opinion of US missile experts both in industry and in government as to the number of ICBMs that could be manufactured in a given period of time, granting a previous successful test.

7. Respecting the Senator's assertion that "over and over again, the Soviet performance in the field of armaments has either surprised us completely or substantially surpassed our estimates" a few examples to the contrary may be worth citing:

- a. In 1950 (the first year of National Intelligence Estimates in present form), jet medium bombers were forecast for the Soviet forces in 1952; they appeared in 1954.
- b. In 1951, thanks to the appearance of a single aircraft identified as a heavy bomber (the so-called Type 31, never thereafter seen) heavy bombers were thenceforth estimated to be brought into Soviet forces; they were in 1954.

- c. In October, 1953, an NIE said that a Soviet surface-to-air missile of native design could be developed by 1955; the first SA-2 battalion became operational in 1958 or early 1959.
- d. In October, 1954, an NIE said that the Soviets could have an ICBM ready for series production about 1963, or at the earliest possible date in 1960; the SS-6 became operational in 1960.
- e. In 1957 an NIE said that the Soviets could not have an ABM by 1962. In 1961 the estimate had become that the Soviets were "pushing hard" on the problem and that ABM deployment would probably occur to a limited degree in the period 1963-1966; the Moscow system with 24 sites was operational in 1968.
- f. In 1965 an NIE said that the Soviets would probably produce a new class of ballistic missile submarine, that it would almost certainly be nuclear powered, and that it would carry perhaps 6-12 missiles of an improved type. That NIE also judged that a new missile with about 1,000 n.m. range would come into service in 1967-1968. These estimates were made purely on the basis of Soviet requirements; there was no hard evidence of such developments at the time. In 1966 we saw the first unit of the new Y-class submarine having 16 launch tubes, and the Soviets began testing a new missile with an estimated range of 1,300 n.m.; this system -- submarine and missile -- became operational in 1968.
- g. In 1965 an NIE said that the Soviets could probably attain an operational capability with a multiple independently guided re-entry vehicle (MIRV) in the period 1970-1975

8. This list could be extended if some of the less glamorous weapons systems were included. I think it is true to say that in the past fifteen or twenty years no important new Soviet weapons system has appeared which has not been heralded in advance in

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National Intelligence Estimates. To be sure, the estimates of probable initial operational dates for these systems have often been wrong, but as the above citations indicate they have usually been wrong because they have set the date too early. This seems to bear on the Senator's remark that "the intelligence community has erred far more frequently on the conservative side than otherwise in their estimates of Soviet capabilities and intentions."

9. I believe it also to be true (though it is a statement open to challenge) that no important Soviet weapons system has surprised the US by exhibiting performance characteristics significantly superior to those estimated for it. Many systems, however, have not measured up to what was expected of them; in this regard we have often been insufficiently conservative.

10. With respect to estimates of numbers of Soviet weapons, weapons systems, or men in uniform, projected into the future, the record is so various that no generalization is useful. I think it can be demonstrated that there has been neither consistent over-estimating nor consistent underestimating; there are plenty of examples of both, together with plenty of substantial accuracy. The methods of intelligence collection now available permit far greater confidence in estimates of current numbers in most categories than was possible a few years ago. We thus are constantly improving the base from which we start to judge the future. But the methods for projecting numbers have had no corresponding improvement; as the Senator observes, it is "an exceedingly difficult task to gather intelligence having to do with the policy and intentions and future production schedules of a closed totalitarian society." For the past five or six years we have put our judgment of future numbers, beyond the two or three years immediately succeeding the date of the estimate, into a separate document, called "projections for planning." One reason for this was to draw attention to the difference between an "estimate," properly speaking, and an exceedingly hypothetical "projection." The distinction has not always been caught by the consumer.

11. Finally, a word about more general estimates; it is not always true that they have been wrong because they were too conservative. For example, we were correct in a conservative view of how far the Soviets would go throughout the prolonged Berlin

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crisis which began in 1958; we estimated that they would not follow the invasion of Czechoslovakia by an attack on Romania; that they would not (despite Bulganin's threats) come to the armed support of Egypt in 1956; that they would not support the Chinese Communists in an attack on the offshore islands in 1958. And, to go back a long way, we consistently estimated after January, 1952, that they would not "deliberately initiate general war" -- a judgment which seems easy in hindsight but which was highly controversial in those early years.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

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